

UKRAINE 2022 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

On February 24, Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and on October 5, it purported to annex four additional oblasts (regions): Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhya. On March 3 and October 12, UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution ES-11/4 condemned Russia's invasion and purported annexation of the four additional Ukrainian territories, respectively. The U.S. government does not recognize the purported annexation of Crimea, Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhya Oblasts by the Russian Federation and considers all of them to be part of Ukraine. In 2014, Russia's military forces invaded Ukraine's eastern Donbas region and the Crimean Peninsula, and Russia purported to annex Crimea. UNGA Resolution 68/262, adopted on March 27, 2014, and entitled Territorial Integrity of Ukraine, states that the referendum on annexation held in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol has no validity and cannot form the basis for any alteration of their status. Since 2014, Russia has occupied Crimea, and Russia-led proxy forces have controlled parts of the Luhansk and Donetsk Oblasts.

Since its invasion of Crimea and portions of Donbas in 2014, according to widespread reports, the Russian Federation and its proxies have committed widespread, ongoing, and egregious violations of the right to freedom of religion and conscience as well as physical and psychological abuse of religious minorities. Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Russia's forces intensified these practices and carried them into other occupied areas. There were reports of widespread regional bans of minority religious groups, including evangelical Christians, Roman and Greek Catholics, and non-Ukrainian Orthodox Church communities; illegal imprisonment, physical abuse, and disappearances of religious leaders; and the deliberate destruction or seizure of religious buildings. Sources stated it was difficult to gain a full accounting of Russia's extensive religious rights violations given heavy censorship of media, abuses against human rights activists, and denial of access to international observers. Religious freedom developments in Russia-occupied areas – Crimea and parts of Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhya Oblasts – are detailed below in the section “Russia-Occupied Territories of Ukraine.”

UKRAINE

Executive Summary

The constitution protects freedom of religion and provides for “the separation of church and religious organizations from the state.” By law, the objective of domestic religious policy is to foster the creation of a tolerant society and provide for freedom of conscience and worship.

On December 1, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy issued a decree for the Cabinet of Ministers to introduce legislation to prohibit religious organizations that are “affiliated with centers of influence in the Russian Federation” to operate in Ukraine. The decree requires this law to be “in accordance with the norms of international law in the field of freedom of conscience and Ukraine's obligations in connection with joining the Council of Europe.” The President also announced sanctions against senior clergy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) for collaboration with Russia, stating they engaged in wartime collaboration with the invader. Although it continued to be unofficially referred to as the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate (or UOC-MP) through year’s end, in May, Church leaders stated it had broken with the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC); a government-commissioned panel of experts, however, concluded the UOC remained connected and subordinate to the ROC. The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) searched numerous UOC religious sites based on stated probable cause of collaboration, yielding what the SBU and civil society observers said was significant evidence of collaboration and other illegal acts.

Jehovah’s Witnesses continued to report assaults on their followers that went unpunished. In February, the government declared martial law and began general mobilization of reservists. The law does not provide for alternative service during mobilization and martial law. There were some arrests for draft refusal and one case of imprisonment, according to reports, although most conscientious objectors were able to perform alternative service. The autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) said Ukrainian government officials in numerous cases continued to interfere in the decision-making process of Orthodox congregations seeking to leave the UOC by disrupting meetings,

preventing registration, and intimidating active parishioners, although they reported fewer incidents by year's end. Local authorities in Lviv allowed a local developer to complete the construction of a private medical clinic on the grounds of a historic Jewish cemetery despite an August 2020 stop-work order from the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy. According to observers, government investigations and prosecutions of vandalism of religious sites continued to be generally inconclusive, although the government condemned attacks and police arrested perpetrators. Representatives of religious groups continued to report problems with local authorities in allocating land to build religious structures and with national authorities regarding restitution claims. President Zelenskyy made several public statements against antisemitism, participated in Jewish cultural events, and condemned Russian attacks on Jewish sites, including its shelling of a location near the site of the 1941 Babyn Yar massacre.

According to numerous sources, Russia's military forces committed widespread religious freedom abuses in both occupied and Ukrainian government-controlled areas, such as shelling religious institutions and cultural heritage sites and detaining clergy, including physically abusing an Orthodox priest seized from a ship in the Black Sea. Responding to a May attack on a monastery in Donetsk Oblast, President Zelenskyy stated that Russia's forces knew there were no military targets at the monastery and that approximately 300 lay individuals, including 60 children, were sheltering there.

The ROC and the UOC continued to label the OCU a "schismatic" group and continued to urge other Orthodox churches not to recognize it. UOC and OCU representatives continued to contest some parish registrations as not reflecting the true will of their congregations. The UOC reported violent threats against some of its congregations. UOC leaders continued to accuse the OCU of seizing churches belonging to the UOC; the OCU responded that parishioners, rather than the OCU, had initiated the transfers of affiliation within the provisions of the law. Church ownership disputes between UOC and OCU members in Zadubrivka village, Chernivtsi Oblast, and some other villages and cities continued. In May, following a UOC Council meeting, the Church announced it disagreed with the position of Patriarch Kirill of the ROC supporting Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and that it took measures making the UOC "fully independent" from the

Moscow Patriarchate, measures that the OCU spokesman, the government, and civil society groups said were insufficient and left the UOC still subordinate to the ROC. The independent National Minorities Rights Monitoring Group (NMRMG) reported one documented violent act of antisemitism, compared with three in 2021. There were again reports of vandalism of Christian monuments, Holocaust memorials, synagogues, Jewish cemeteries, and Jehovah's Witnesses' kingdom halls. The All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (AUCCRO) continued to promote interfaith dialogue and respect for religious diversity.

U.S. embassy officials, including the Ambassador, engaged with officials of the Office of the President, ministry officials, members of parliament, and municipal governments to discuss the importance of fair and transparent treatment of religious groups, preservation of religious heritage sites, support for religious minorities, and combating manifestations of antisemitism. Senior U.S. officials, including the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, and Deputy Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism, spoke out publicly against Russia's attacks on religious heritage sites. Embassy officials continued to urge government and religious leaders to practice tolerance, restraint, and mutual understanding to ensure respect for all individuals' religious freedom and preferences. Embassy officials also continued to encourage religious groups to resolve property disputes peacefully and through dialogue with government officials.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 43.5 million (mid-year 2022). The country's pre-war population was approximately 43.5 million, according to UN and Ukrainian State Statistical Services estimates, but an estimated 7.8 million individuals have fled following Russia's February 2022 full-scale invasion. According to the annual November national survey conducted by the Razumkov Center, an independent public policy think tank, 62.7 percent of respondents identify as Christian Orthodox, compared with 60.0 percent in 2021; 10.2 percent Greek Catholic (Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, UGCC), compared with 8.8 percent in 2021; 3.7 percent Protestant, compared with 1.5 percent in

2021; 1.9 percent Roman Catholic, compared with 0.8 percent in 2021; 0.2 percent Muslim, the same as in 2021; and 0.1 Jewish, the same as in 2021. The survey found another 8.7 percent identify as “simply a Christian,” compared with 8.5 percent in 2021, while 11.7 percent state they do not belong to any religious group, compared with 18.8 percent in 2021. Small numbers of Buddhists, pagans (following traditional pre-Christian polytheistic beliefs, including animism), followers of other religions, and individuals choosing not to disclose their beliefs constitute the remainder of the respondents.

According to government statistics, followers of the UGCC reside primarily in the western oblasts of Lviv, Ternopil, and Ivano-Frankivsk. Most Roman Catholic Church (RCC) congregations are in Lviv, Khmelnytsky, Zhytomyr, Vinnytsya, Zakarpattia, and Ternopil Oblasts, in the western part of the country. According to the government’s estimate, as of January 1, most OCU congregations (formed in 2018 by the merger of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate, Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, and part of the UOC) are in the central and western parts of the country, except for Zakarpattia Oblast. Most UOC congregations are in the Donetsk, Luhansk, and Odesa Oblasts; some also appear in the central and western parts of the country, excluding Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, and Ternopil Oblasts. Public polling shows 39-54 percent of the population identifies with the OCU and 3-5 percent with the UOC, with the remainder not identifying specifically with either group.

The Evangelical Baptist Union of Ukraine is the largest Protestant community. Other Christian groups include Pentecostals, Seventh-day Adventists, Lutherans, Anglicans, Reformed, Methodists, Presbyterians, members of Jehovah’s Witnesses, and members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ).

Government agencies and independent think tanks estimate the Muslim population at 500,000, while some Muslim leaders estimate two million. According to government figures, 300,000 of these are Crimean Tatars.

The Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities (VAAD) states there are approximately 300,000 persons of Jewish ancestry in the country. According to

VAAD, prior to the Russian aggression in eastern Ukraine in 2014, approximately 30,000 Jews lived in the Donbas region (Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts). Jewish groups estimate between 10,000 and 15,000 Jewish residents lived in Crimea before Russia's purported annexation in 2014.

There are also small numbers of Buddhists, Hindus, practitioners of Falun Gong, Baha'is, and adherents of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, including worship. By law, the government may restrict this right only in the "interests of protecting public order [or] the health and morality of the population or protecting the rights and freedoms of other persons." The constitution provides for the "separation of church and religious organizations from the state" and stipulates, "No religion shall be recognized by the state as mandatory."

The criminal code determines punishment, in the form of a fine or imprisonment, for "willful actions inciting national, racial, or religious enmity and hatred, humiliation of national honor and dignity, or the insult of citizens' feelings with respect to their religious convictions, and also any direct or indirect restriction of rights, or granting direct or indirect privileges to citizens based on race, color of skin, political, religious and other convictions, disability, sex, ethnic and social origin, property status, place of residence, [or] linguistic or other characteristics."

By law, the objective of religious policy is to "restore full-fledged dialogue between representatives of various social, ethnic, cultural, and religious groups to foster the creation of a tolerant society and provide for freedom of conscience and worship." The law on the condemnation of the Communist and Nazi regimes establishes punishment for public denial of the criminal nature of those regimes, dissemination of information aimed at justifying their criminal nature, and the production and/or dissemination and public use of products containing their symbols.

The law requires the government to investigate crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes committed by the Communist and Nazi regimes, and to identify and preserve mass graves of their victims, research and publish information about repression, mass and individual murder, deaths, deportation, torture, use of forced labor and other forms of mass physical terror, and persecution based on “ethnic, national, religious, political, class, social, and other factors.” The law also requires the government to raise public awareness of Communist and Nazi-era crimes and to support nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) conducting research and education in that area.

A law passed in 2021 defines the concept of antisemitism and reaffirms punishment for crimes motivated by antisemitism. The law also reaffirms punishment for making false or stereotypical statements about persons of Jewish origin, producing, or disseminating materials containing antisemitic statements or content, and denying the facts of the persecution and mass killing of Jews during the Holocaust. The state may charge those found guilty of violating the law with civil, administrative, and criminal liability. Victims may also receive compensation for “material and moral damages.” Parliament’s passage of legislation implementing the law was pending at year’s end. In February, parliament passed legislation increasing penalties for incitement to antisemitic acts, with prison sentences of five to eight years.

Religious organizations include religious congregations, administrations and centers, theological schools, monasteries, religious brotherhoods, missions, and associations consisting of those religious organizations. Religious associations are represented by their centers (administrations). To register and obtain legal-entity status, an organization must register either with the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy, which until December 20 was the government agency responsible for religious affairs, or with regional government authorities, depending upon the nature of the organization. Religious centers, administrations, monasteries, brotherhoods, missions, and schools register with the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy.

Congregations register with the oblast authorities where they are present. While these congregations may form the constituent units of a nationwide religious organization, the nationwide organization does not register on a national basis and may not obtain recognition as a legal entity. The constituent units instead register individually and obtain legal-entity status.

The law directs regional governments' religious affairs departments to handle dual registration. The law required all religious organizations to update and reregister their statutes by January 31, 2020. The law also specifies reregistration requirements for organizations that wish to change their affiliation, particularly UOC parishes seeking to join the OCU. The law requires a quorum, as defined by each congregation and usually comprising two-thirds or three-fourths of a religious organization's members, to decide on a change of affiliation. The law also requires a vote by two-thirds of those present to authorize such a decision. The law bans any transfer of an organization's property until the affiliation change is finalized.

To be eligible for registration, a religious congregation must comprise at least 10 adult members and submit to the registration authorities its statute (charter), certified copies of the resolution that created it and was adopted by founding members, and a document confirming its right to own or use premises.

Registered religious organizations, which include individual religious congregations, administrative offices, theological schools, monasteries, religious brotherhoods and sisterhoods, missions, and religious associations, must register with tax authorities to acquire nonprofit status, which many do for banking purposes.

Without legal-entity status, a religious organization may not own property, conduct banking activities, be eligible for utility bill discounts, join civic or advisory boards of government agencies, or establish periodicals, nongovernmental pension funds, officially accredited schools, publishing, agricultural and other companies, or companies manufacturing religious items. Religious organizations without legal-entity status may meet and worship and may also publish and distribute religious materials. In accordance with the stipulation against national

registration, however, only a registered constituent unit of a nationwide religious association may own property or conduct business activities, either for itself or on behalf of the nationwide association. The law grants property tax exemptions to religious organizations and considers them nonprofit organizations.

The law requires commanders of military units to allow their subordinates to participate in religious services but bans the creation of religious organizations in military institutions and military units. The law prohibits UOC priests from serving as chaplains on bases or in conflict zones.

A law on military chaplaincy defines selection criteria for clergy to become chaplains, their status in the chain of command, and their rights and duties in the Armed Forces, National Guard, State Border Guard Service, and other military formations. The legislation institutionalizes military chaplaincy according to NATO principles, gives chaplains the status of full-fledged service members, and provides for the same type of financial and social security support as other service members. The law protects the confidentiality of confession to a military chaplain and provides for the creation of interfaith councils on military chaplaincy as advisory bodies at the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Internal Affairs.

According to the constitution, organizers must notify local authorities in advance of any type of planned public gathering, and authorities may challenge the legality of the planned event. According to a 2016 Constitutional Court decision, religious organizations need only inform local authorities of their intention to hold a public gathering and need not apply for permission or notify authorities within a specific period in advance of the event.

Government regulations on identity documents, including passports, allow religious head coverings in photographs.

The law allows religious organizations to establish theological schools to train clergy and other religious workers as well as to seek state accreditation through the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance for their curriculum. The law states theological schools shall function based on their own statutes.

Government agencies authorized to monitor religious organizations include the Prosecutor General, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and all other “central bodies of the executive government.”

Only registered religious organizations may seek restitution of communal property confiscated by the former Communist regime. Religious organizations must apply to regional authorities for property restitution. The law states authorities should complete their consideration of a restitution claim within a month.

The law prohibits religious instruction as part of the mandatory public school curriculum and states public school training “shall be free from interference by political parties, civic, and religious organizations.” Public schools include “ethics of faith” or similar faith-related courses as optional parts of the curricula. The law provides that Christian, Islamic, and Jewish-focused curriculums may offer ethics of faith courses in public schools.

The law provides for antidiscrimination screening of draft legislation and government regulations, including for discrimination based on religion. The law requires the legal department of each respective agency responsible for verifying draft legislation to conduct screening in accordance with instructions developed by the Cabinet of Ministers to ensure the draft legislation does not contain discriminatory language and to require changes if it does. Religious organizations may participate in screening draft legislation at the invitation of the respective agency.

The law allows alternative nonmilitary service for conscientious objectors. The law also allows government officials to deny a conscript’s application for alternative service due to missing the application deadline. The law does not exempt the clergy from military mobilization. The law allows no exemption from military reserve service during the “special period” (i.e., while hostilities with Russia’s forces continue), even for conscientious objectors. A 1999 Cabinet of Ministers resolution listed 10 religious groups whose system of beliefs “does not permit the use of weapons.” The document stipulates that only the men affiliated with those 10 groups are eligible for the alternative service: Reformist Adventists;

Seventh-day Adventists; Evangelical Christians; Evangelical Christians-Baptists; the Slavic Church of the Holy Ghost (“The Penitents”); Jehovah's Witnesses; Charismatic Christian Churches and associated churches under their registered statutes; Union of Christians of the Evangelical Faith – Pentecostals and associated churches under their registered statutes; Christians of Evangelical Faith; and the Society for Krishna Consciousness.

The Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights (“Ombudsperson”) is constitutionally required to release an annual report to parliament containing a section on religious freedom.

The law restricts the activities of foreign-based religious groups and defines the permissible activities of noncitizen clergy, preachers, teachers, and other representatives of foreign-based religious groups. By law, foreign religious workers may “preach, administer religious ordinances, or practice other canonical activities,” but they may do so only for the registered religious organization that invited them and with the approval of the government body that registered the statute of the organization. Missionary activity is included under permissible activities.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Since 2015, the government has exercised the right of derogation from its obligations under the ICCPR regarding the portions of the Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts under the control of Russia-led forces, including the ICCPR provisions pertaining to religious freedom. Since the introduction of martial law on February 24, 2022, following Russia’s full-scale invasion, the government has exercised the right of derogation from obligations under various articles of the ICCPR. Among its provisions, martial law converted regional and local governments to regional military administrations, imposed a ban on military-aged men leaving the country, and strengthened governmental powers of search and seizure; however, Article 18, which protects freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, remains fully in force.

Government Practices

Jehovah's Witnesses continued to call on the government to implement four 2020 European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) decisions to ensure effective investigation of the hate crimes committed against the group and its places of worship between 2009-2013 and to prosecute the perpetrators of those religiously motivated attacks. Jehovah's Witnesses stated the government took no specific measures to implement ECHR judgments in the cases *Zagubnya and Tabachkova v. Ukraine*, *Migoryanu and Others v. Ukraine*, *Kornilova v. Ukraine*, and *Tretiak v. Ukraine*

Some Jewish leaders and human rights activists continued to state concerns regarding what they considered impunity for hate crimes, including acts of antisemitism, and regarding the government's long delays in completing investigations of these crimes. They also objected to authorities' prosecuting many antisemitic acts as "hooliganism" rather than as hate crimes. According to the Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group, the lack of proper punishment for hate crimes "has long been a major problem, exacerbated by Article 161 of the criminal code [on incitement to enmity, religious, racial and other discrimination, etc.], which is notoriously difficult to prove and therefore most often avoided by the police and prosecutors." Some Jewish leaders said law enforcement authorities often charged antisemitic actors, if apprehended, with hooliganism or vandalism instead of a hate crime in what they assessed was an attempt to downplay the criminal behavior. According to Freedom House, "Qualified professional legal assessment of hate crimes remains a serious problem: a motive either being ignored immediately with the crime qualified under other articles of the criminal code, or it is 'lost' at the stage of judicial inquiry." Because it was harder to prove intent in hate crimes, some prosecutors reportedly chose to charge suspects with hooliganism instead.

In a February 9 statement, the UN Human Rights Committee expressed concern regarding conscientious objectors being delivered to military assembly points against their will and conscripts being subjected to arbitrary detention. It also expressed concern regarding "the lack of information on investigations into such cases and on the prosecution of those responsible." The committee stressed that "alternatives to military service should be available to all conscientious objectors

without discrimination as to the nature of their beliefs justifying the objection (be they religious beliefs or non-religious beliefs grounded in conscience) and should be neither punitive nor discriminatory in nature or duration by comparison with military service.”

According to the international religious freedom NGO Forum 18, on August 21, the Defense Ministry told the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement that during martial law, the right to do alternative civilian service had been suspended. Legal sources noted that the law does not provide for alternative nonmilitary service during the martial law and mobilization.

According to Forum 18, in June, the Ivano-Frankivsk military enlistment office summoned Vitaliy Alekseyenko for mobilization. He reportedly had a valid, government-issued certificate confirming that he had not served in the military in the 1990s in Uzbekistan, where he then lived, on grounds of conscience. Alekseyenko, citing his religious beliefs, stated he could not take up arms, but he was not a member of a church, and enlistment officers reportedly told him that only members of the 10 registered faiths with the right to perform alternative service could do so, refusing his request for alternative civilian service. On September 15, the Ivano-Frankivsk City Court sentenced Alekseyenko to one year in prison. He appealed the verdict.

During the year, the State Service for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience (DESS) again reaffirmed its commitment to promoting uniformity and transparency in the provision of administrative services to religious organizations, including the examination of their registration applications, and continued its work to create an electronic register of religious organizations. DESS developed technical specifications and a feasibility study for an electronic platform combining databases and services related to the country’s religious organizations. DESS officials said the system was designed to “significantly enhance transparency and uniformity of policies in the area of religious freedom.”

On December 1, a presidential decree mandated direct subordination of DESS, previously operating as part of the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy, to the Cabinet of Ministers. According to the decree, DESS was also tasked with

ensuring the conduct of “a religious expert examination of the Statute on the Administration of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church for the presence of a church-canonical connection with the Moscow Patriarchate, and if necessary, to take the measures provided for by the law.” On December 16, the government appointed Viktor Yelensky, a religious scholar, as new DESS head.

The December 1 decree called on the Cabinet of Ministers to introduce legislation “making it impossible” for religious organizations “affiliated with centers of influence in the Russian Federation in accordance with the norms of international law in the field of freedom of conscience and Ukraine's obligations in connection with joining the Council of Europe” to operate in the country. The President also announced sanctions against senior UOC clergy for activities such as offering to annex their dioceses directly into the Russian Orthodox Church, collaborating with occupying authorities, and publicly supporting Russia’s aggression. Although it often continued to be informally referred to as the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate (or UOC-MP) through year’s end, in May, church leaders stated it had separated from the ROC. A government-commissioned panel of experts, however, concluded it remained connected and subordinate to the ROC.

Following issuance of the decree, the SBU searched numerous UOC religious sites, based on probable cause, and uncovered what it stated was significant evidence of collaboration and other illegal activities. In all, according to media sources, the government initiated more than 50 criminal investigations involving clergy for collaboration or treason during the year, out of more than 41,000 collaboration investigations nationwide. According to a November 23 Associated Press article, the SBU reported its agents had searched more than 350 church buildings under the authority of the UOC, including the historic Pechersk Lavra monastic complex in Kyiv. In response to the searches, UOC representatives, including Deputy Head of External Church Relations Department Archpriest Mykolay Danylevych, reiterated that as of May, the UOC was no longer Russian and was no longer affiliated with the Russian Orthodox Church. Metropolitan Oleksandr of the OCU supported the searches, stating, “I think it is better there will be searches than some people who help guide enemy missiles.” On December 1, Forum 18 reported that the OCU announced the government had registered a Pechersk

Lavra monastery community under the authority of the OCU in addition to the existing UOC-affiliated Pechersk Lavra monastery community.

In a statement shared with CNN in December, the SBU said that while it was not illegal to store Russian propaganda, it was illegal to distribute it, stating, “If such literature is in the library of a diocese or on the shelves of a church shop, it is obvious that it is intended for mass distribution.” According to DESS head Yelensky, for more than 30 years, UOC leadership had been “poisoning people with the ideas of the Russian world” (commonly defined as a Russian nationalist concept in which Ukraine is part of a greater Russian nation, under a common church [Moscow Patriarchate] and leader [Vladimir Putin]). Yelensky compared the SBU’s raids of UOC sites to actions against Islamic extremism after September 11, 2001 and said, “Ukraine is still a safe haven for religious freedom.” Ukrainian and international security experts also stated that the UOC has frequently served as a proxy for the Russian state since the church’s founding in 1990.

Some experts on religious affairs continued to call on the government to abolish the dual registration requirement mandating that congregations apply for both entry into the State Register of Legal Entities database and government registration of their statutes.

News sources reported that the UOC continued to question the legitimacy of the OCU and to allege that the OCU was “stealing” its property. The OCU stated the UOC legally challenged the reregistration of parishes from the UOC to the OCU and manipulated votes on affiliation change by disqualifying pro-OCU participants. On July 15, the OCU issued a statement to emphasize its concern over the “growing number of reports about numerous cases of direct or indirect interference” by officials into the “voluntary decision-making process of Orthodox congregations seeking to leave the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine.” According to the OCU, some government officials disrupted meetings of such congregations, interfered with governmental registration of the congregations’ statutes, and “intimidated” active parishioners and clerics by using “instruments of criminal proceedings.” The OCU reported the government took a more neutral stance on the issue toward year’s end.

On August 28, DESS published recommendations for religious congregations and regional governments concerning the law governing changes of affiliation by religious congregations. DESS reminded government officials that the law prohibited them from convening and chairing meetings of religious congregations and voting at such meetings in their official capacity. It also stressed that the majoritarian religious views of community residents “shall not be imposed” on a local religious congregation or used to take possession of the congregation’s properties. The UOC continued to report instances of “unlawful” reregistration by some local governments. The OCU denied these charges.

The *LB.ua* news site reported that on September 7, Kyiv SBU Main Directorate Deputy Chief Yuriy Palahnyuk sent a letter to local governments citing the DESS guidance and instructing them to cease organizing or participating in public gatherings of congregants to discuss switching affiliation from the UOC to the OCU. Palahnyuk said the mass gatherings were socially destabilizing and impermissible under martial law. The OCU sent the SBU a protest letter, stating that DESS and Palahnyuk were creating artificial bureaucratic barriers to Orthodox believers’ exercising the right to freely choose their affiliations. The SBU suspended Palahnyuk from official duties, telling media the letters did not reflect its official position and were sent “on his own initiative.”

The Constitutional Court completed its review of a 2020 petition by a group of members of parliament questioning the constitutionality of 2018 amendments to the law on freedom of conscience and religious organizations requiring foreign-affiliated religious organizations and associations to rename themselves to reflect their affiliation with foreign entities. The amendments would have a direct effect on UOC entities, given the church’s relationship with the ROC. The petition and a 2019 Supreme Court ruling in a separate suit by the UOC Metropolitan Administration against the amendments prevented the government from enforcing the name change requirement for 267 UOC congregations. The congregations were a third party in the lawsuit filed by the UOC Metropolitan Administration. On December 27, the Constitutional Court ruled that the 2018 amendments were constitutional. The UOC said the law did not apply to its religious organizations because of its newly declared independence from the ROC.

According to the head of the UOC Legal Department, Archpriest Oleksandr Bakhov, since the 2019 law entered into effect, government officials often refused to register routine updates to statutes of UOC congregations, citing UOC noncompliance with the renaming requirement.

On November 2, the Administration of the Kyiv and All-Ukraine Diocese of the Russian Old-Rite Orthodox Church changed its name to the Ancient Orthodox Church of Ukraine.

In August, the government called on Hasidic pilgrims to refrain from visiting the country during the annual Rosh Hashanah pilgrimage to the grave of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov in Uman, Cherkasy Oblast, due to safety concerns caused by Russia's full-scale invasion. The oblast military administration increased security measures in the city from September 19 to September 30 during the pilgrimage, citing the “high likelihood of Russian missile strikes, and the terrorist threat aimed at destabilizing interethnic relations and damaging Ukraine’s international image” during the celebration. According to news reports, law enforcement agencies implemented antisabotage and antiterrorism measures, including the deployment of additional personnel to Uman. An estimated 23,000 pilgrims, overwhelmingly from abroad, took part in the pilgrimage.

Jehovah’s Witnesses reported they resumed in-person missionary activity. From June to December, they documented 12 incidents of interference, including three by private individuals and nine by authorities. They stated they filed no criminal complaints with police, and the majority of incidents involving officials were settled “amicably, through personal visits.”

According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, on November 27, municipal officers Vasyl Tymchyshyn and Marian Vovk accused Jehovah’s Witnesses Rolan Stankevych and Marat Kupaiev of the administrative offense of setting up a mobile display of missionary materials at a public place in Lviv. Although the Witnesses stated to the officers that the activity was educational, the officers accused them of encroachment on a public area and “unauthorized installation of a wooden structure.”

According to the UOC as reported in the local press, on April 10, during a liturgy at a local UOC church, government representatives and local UGCC and OCU parishioners entered the building and demanded that UOC priest Illya Uruskyy stop the service. The visitors reportedly “pulled” him from the church, ordered him to close it, and threatened to harm UOC parishioners if they did not join either a local UGCC or OCU congregation. The UOC source stated that law enforcement agencies refused to accept a UOC complaint about the incident. According to the UOC, later the same day, SBU officers came to the priest's home, put a bag over his head, and took him to their Lviv office. They kept Uruskyy there overnight and interrogated him on April 11. A fire caused major damage to the church in the early hours of April 11, and the SBU representatives reportedly accused him of setting the fire during the night he had spent in detention. Uruskyy rejected the charge. After the interrogation, the officers again put a bag on his head and took him to a bus station, where they released him. According to village mayor Yeva Semkiv, UOC parishioners declined a request by community members to leave the UOC. “The community closed down the church and the fire started during the next night,” said Semkiv.

The RCC called on the government to finalize the transfer of St. Nicholas Cathedral in Kyiv to its congregation on February 22. It said the facility required urgent repairs after a September 2021 fire and that foreign donors, who it said were ready to assist, could only disburse funds once ownership was transferred. The Ministry of Culture and Information Policy attributed the delay to martial law and the need to relocate the government-run National House of Organ and Chamber Music, which shares space with the cathedral, to a suitable building.

Small religious groups stated local authorities continued to discriminate when allocating land for religious buildings in Sumy and Mykolayiv Oblasts. UGCC members and Muslims continued to report cases of discrimination. UGCC representatives said local authorities in Bila Tserkva were still unwilling to allocate land for a UGCC church at year's end, a request originally made in 2008.

Kyiv's Muslim community said the local government, which is responsible for allocating land for cemeteries, had still not acted on the community's 2017 request for additional free land in or near Kyiv for Islamic burials, which the

Muslim community considered its legal right because by law, local authorities may designate cemetery land for the use of a specific religious group. Consequently, some Muslim families in Kyiv reportedly had to bury their relatives in other cities.

All major religious organizations continued to appeal to the government to establish a transparent legal process for addressing property restitution claims. According to observers, the government made little progress on unresolved restitution issues during the year. Representatives of some organizations said they experienced continuing problems and delays reclaiming property seized by the former Communist regime and said a review of claims often took far longer than the month prescribed by law. Christian, Jewish, and Muslim groups stated several factors continued to complicate the restitution process, including the Russian invasion, intercommunity competition for specific properties, current use of some properties by state institutions, the designation of some properties as historic landmarks, local governments disputing jurisdictional boundaries, and previous transfers of some properties to private ownership.

Muslim community leaders continued to state concern regarding the continuing lack of resolution of a restitution claim involving the site containing the ruins of a historic mosque in Mykolayiv, in the southern part of the country. According to Muslim leaders, the local government was reluctant to resolve the issue. Sources stated that Russia's temporary control over portions of Mykolayiv Oblast, repeated attacks on the city, and other wartime contingencies likely made progress on the issue difficult or impossible.

Jewish community leaders continued to report illegal construction on the site of a historic Jewish cemetery in Uman, where businesspersons had purchased old houses bordering the cemetery to demolish them and build hotels for Jewish pilgrims. According to news reports, developers reportedly made deals with local government officials to obtain building permits. On September 5, the Uman District Prosecutor's Office opened an investigation of improper execution of official duties by local government officials who failed to prevent unsanctioned construction of six buildings in the protected historical heritage area.

The Jewish community continued to express concern regarding the ongoing operation of the Krakivskyy Market on the grounds of a historic Jewish cemetery in Lviv. City authorities, Jewish community members, and market kiosk owners agreed to install three memorials to renowned rabbis buried beneath the active market. Construction on the first memorial started in 2021 but was suspended following Russia's full-scale invasion. Despite a 2020 Ministry of Culture and Information Policy order that a local developer halt construction of a private health clinic, Lviv authorities allowed the developer to complete the project, stating that the renovation of the clinic did not require excavation. According to reports, the developer completed the project during the year and transferred ownership to another party. The Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union (UCSJ) stated excavation had occurred and that bones were uncovered. The government had taken no action by year's end to act on the UCSJ's request for an independent investigation to determine whether the bones were human. The UCSJ also continued to urge the government to halt permanently the construction of a multistory commercial building on the cemetery grounds separate from the health clinic construction that had been ordered suspended in 2017. According to local authorities, the commercial building project in question involved reconstruction of an existing building and required no excavation.

Jewish community representatives expressed cautious optimism about the Ternopil local government's stated intention to return a prayer house confiscated during the Soviet era.

On September 29, President Zelenskyy honored the memory of victims of the Holocaust massacre at Babyn Yar in 1941. "The world should do everything to prevent similar tragedies and crimes against humanity, which, unfortunately, still happen today, particularly on Ukrainian soil. Any inhumane regimes pose a threat to all humanity. Criminals who cause such tragedies must be punished. So that dictators and tyrants are reluctant to repeat something similar in the future."

In his address on May 8, the Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation, President Zelenskyy paid tribute to "all those who defended their homeland and the world from Nazism. We note the Ukrainian people and their contribution to the victory of the anti-Hitler coalition. Explosions, shots, trenches, wounds, famine, bombing, blockades, mass executions, punitive operations, occupation,

concentration camps, gas chambers, yellow stars, ghettos, Babyn Yar, Katyn, captivity, forced labor. They died so that each of us knows what these words mean from books, not from our own experience. But it happened differently. This is unfair to them all. But the truth will win. And we will overcome everything!”

In his address to the nation on May 2, President Zelenskyy condemned a statement by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, who said Jews themselves were some of the biggest antisemites: “No one hears objections or excuses from Moscow. There is silence. Hence, they agree with what their Foreign Minister said. After the Russian missile attack at Babyn Yar in Kyiv, after the Menorah damaged by shelling at the site of the mass executions in Drobytsky Yar near Kharkiv, after the deaths of ordinary people who survived the Nazi occupation and Nazi concentration camps from Russian shelling, such an antisemitic thrust by their minister means Russia has forgotten all the lessons of World War II.”

On January 27, International Holocaust Remembrance Day, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement calling for a “concerted effort to prevent all manifestations of xenophobia, antisemitism, and intolerance” and pledging that “the commemoration of Holocaust victims on Ukrainian soil will never stop.”

On July 26, the United Jewish Community of Ukraine called on the government to prosecute a former Kyiv City Council member for having promoted antisemitic blood libel accusations against the Jewish community. The United Jewish Community of Ukraine stated that former council member Mykhailo Kovalchuk should face legal action for a post he wrote that invoked the blood libel charge that Jews slaughter non-Jews for their religious rites. Kovalchuk posted that “Satanism is a form of Judaism,” adding that “some orthodox Jews practice ritual murder of people, most often their victims are small children, children of non-Jews (goyim).”

On October 25, President Zelenskyy met with members of the Supervisory Board of the privately funded Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center (BYHMC). He reaffirmed support for the construction of the center. Some Jewish community members and historians said they questioned the motivation of some contributors to the BYHMC, noting some had connections to Russia, and they

stressed the need to hold a public debate about the commemoration of victims of Babyn Yar, the Holocaust, the Second World War, and Nazi and Communist regimes prior to creating a memorial at Babyn Yar.

According to observers, government investigations and prosecutions of vandalism against religious sites continued to be generally inconclusive, although the government condemned these incidents and police arrested perpetrators.

According to a December 26 report by the United Jewish Community of Ukraine, unidentified vandals sprayed antisemitic graffiti on the wall of a building in Uzhhorod. Police opened an investigation.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported six incidents of vandalism committed against houses of worship during the year. They said the incidents were "devoid of explicit religious bias indicators, but kingdom halls are clearly marked and are known as houses of worship."

According to Jehovah's Witnesses, on January 24, unidentified individuals wrote the word "sect," which carries negative connotation in Ukrainian, on a fence surrounding a kingdom hall in Volodymyr-Volynskyy, Volyn Oblast. A local court ordered police to open an investigation, which they did, adding it to the investigations of three similar acts of vandalism committed against the same kingdom hall in 2020. According to the privately-owned court verdicts database *Verdictum.ligazakon.net*, on January 14, police began to investigate the three 2020 incidents as "hooliganism" following the filing of a complaint of religiously motivated hate crimes. The cases remained pending at year's end.

Actions of Foreign Forces and Nonstate Actors

According to religious and media sources, since beginning their full-scale invasion on February 24, Russia's forces committed numerous and egregious human rights abuses, including attacks on religious institutions, in areas of the country controlled by the Ukrainian government and in areas temporarily controlled by Russia and later liberated by the Ukrainian military.

The research consortium Conflict Observatory identified 506 places of worship or burial sites damaged or destroyed by Russia's forces between February 24 and December 31, in both occupied and Ukrainian-controlled areas. The Institute for Religious Freedom similarly found that Russia's forces had "destroyed, damaged, or looted" nearly 500 religious buildings, theological institutions, and sacred sites in Ukraine and had disproportionately attacked evangelical Christians.

According to Imam Timur Beridze, the head of the Muslim community in Luhansk Oblast, in June, Russia's shelling destroyed a mosque in the town of Severodonetsk while it was under Ukrainian government control, killing civilians who sheltered in the building. Bodies of at least 17 persons charred beyond recognition were found in the rubble after the shelling.

According to the Office of the Prosecutor General, on May 4, Russia bombed the UOC Svyatohirsk Lavra monastery compound in the government-controlled part of Donetsk Oblast, wounding seven internally displaced persons sheltering at the monastery. On June 1, Russia's artillery struck the monastery, causing serious structural damage to several buildings, killing three monks and a nun and wounding six more. The deceased were buried on June 3, while Russia's forces continued shelling the monastery. On June 4, Russia's forces destroyed the All-Saints monastic settlement located in the vicinity of the Svyatohirsk Lavra monastery. In a Telegram social media post on June 1, President Zelenskyy condemned the attacks: "The occupiers know what site they are shelling. They know there are no military targets at the Svyatohirsk Lavra. They know that about 300 lay people, including 60 children, are sheltering there from the fighting."

On February 26, Russia's forces detained OCU priest and rescue ship chaplain Vasyl Vyrozub off the coast of Snake Island, in the Black Sea. According to *Nv.ua* news website, they transferred him to a filtration camp near Shebekino in Russia's Belgorod Oblast, where during the arrival procedure, guards forced him to kneel with his hands behind his head in freezing temperatures for many hours. Upon arrival at the camp, Vyrozub and other prisoners received no food for two days. The guards also beat him with a rifle butt and hurled verbal abuse at him, setting dogs on him and other prisoners to force them to move faster. On March 18,

according to Vyrozub, Russian authorities transferred him to a pretrial detention center in Sary Oskol, Belgorod Oblast, where local guards regularly beat the priest and set dogs on him. The detention center administration kept him naked for four days in an unheated punishment cell and reportedly subjected the priest to daily torture and interrogations. After failing to force him to confess to what he said were fake espionage charges, prison administrators placed him in 15 days of solitary confinement, with no toilet facilities. Russia's forces released Vyrozub on May 6.

On March 1, a Russian missile struck Kyiv near the site of the Babyn Yar Holocaust massacre, killing five passersby. The blast damaged a museum building at the site undergoing reconstruction and burned and uprooted trees in the area. The strike sparked vocal condemnation in and outside Ukraine. "What is the point of saying 'never again' for 80 years if the world stays silent when a bomb drops on the same site of Babyn Yar? At least five killed. History repeating," tweeted President Zelenskyy. The head of the supervisory board of the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center, Natan Sharansky, said in a public statement, "Putin's decision to distort and manipulate the Holocaust to justify an illegal invasion of a sovereign democratic country is utterly abhorrent. It is symbolic that he starts attacking Kyiv by bombing the site of Babyn Yar, the biggest of Nazi massacres."

According to the RCC, Russia's forces vandalized and looted the theological seminary in Vorzel, Kyiv Oblast, during their February-April occupation of the area. Russian military personnel used a seminary chapel as a toilet and looted liturgical items, air conditioners, washing machines, computers, routers, kitchen utensils, and personal belongings of seminary staff and students.

On October 26, media outlets reported Russian shelling of a cemetery in Bakhmut, in the Ukrainian government-controlled part of Donetsk Oblast. Aerial footage showed a large crater with human remains and tombstones scattered around the burial area.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

According to numerous sources, Russia's invasion of Ukraine exacerbated preexisting tensions between the OCU and UOC during the year.

The National Minorities Rights Monitoring Group (NMRMG) reported a decrease in antisemitic violence, with one suspected case reported during the year compared with three cases in 2021. As of December, the NMRMG recorded five cases of antisemitic vandalism, compared with 13 incidents during the same period in 2021.

According to the Jewish community, in April, police arrested a man they suspected of having stabbed Igor Perelman three times on March 31. Perelman is the director of the Jewish Community of the city of Ivano-Frankivsk, in the western part of the country, where many persons had fled to escape Russian attacks in the eastern part of the country. After being held for three months, the suspect was reportedly released on bail. Police completed an investigation and forwarded the case to court. The court hearing was scheduled to begin in 2023.

On January 31, the United Jewish Community of Ukraine (UJCU) published video footage showing an unknown individual destroying a Holocaust monument in Lysychansk with a sledgehammer. Both the incident, which occurred in December 2021, and the publication of the video occurred before Russia's full-scale invasion, when the area was still under government control. Before the video was made public, local authorities attributed the damage to bad weather. On January 19, the memorial was destroyed again after an initial restoration. Police opened an investigation. On January 27, local government leaders and Jewish community representatives held a Holocaust commemoration event near the monument following its second restoration. Jewish community members thanked the regional government for its support with the restoration.

Before the full-scale invasion, *New Lines Magazine* reported that Jewish emigration had slowed to 2,000 to 3,000 persons per year. According to the Jewish Agency for Israel, between January 1 and December 1, 14,680 individuals emigrated to Israel. According to a March 10 *Washington Post* article, a consortium of Jewish organizations helped 3,000 individuals, mostly women,

children, and elderly who identified as Jewish, to flee to Moldova, and another 3,000 to Poland, Hungary, and Romania.

On January 28, unidentified vandals splashed a Holocaust memorial in Dnipro with red paint and destroyed candle lamps near the memorial. Police opened an investigation.

The ROC and the UOC continued to publicly describe the OCU as a “schismatic” group, even though the OCU was granted a Tomos (decree) of Autocephaly by the Ecumenical Patriarch in 2019. The ROC continued to urge Orthodox churches around the world not to recognize the OCU.

On May 27, the UOC held a church council, which took a number of decisions related to Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. In addition to condemning war in general and appealing for negotiations between Ukraine and Russia, the council’s statement expressed disagreement with the proinvasion stance of Patriarch Kirill. The statement also announced modifications to church statutes “which testify to the complete independence and autonomy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.” In response, Archbishop Yevstratiy of Chernihiv, the OCU spokesman, criticized the UOC statement as “light rain from a big cloud,” saying that the statement referred to independence and autonomy rather than autocephaly, and that the church was still taking direction from the ROC. Archimandrite Cyril Hovorun, a Ukrainian theologian and professor of Ecclesiology, International Relations, and Ecumenism at University College Stockholm, said however, that the May 27 decision signaled “real and tectonic change” of the UOC’s course “away from Moscow and toward UOC independence.” He said the ROC was making every effort to reverse that change.

UOC representatives often contested parish re-registrations, stating some local government officials breached the law by allowing individuals unaffiliated with the UOC to vote in meetings to change the affiliation of local parishes to the OCU. According to the UOC, some local authorities transferred parish affiliations against the will of parishioners. The UOC also said officials allowed OCU supporters to take possession of disputed facilities before the change of affiliation was officially registered.

OCU representatives accused the UOC of contesting legitimate changes of parish affiliation and reported that since 2019, the UOC had initiated more than 100 lawsuits against oblast government decisions to register UOC congregations that joined the OCU. They said the suits were part of the UOC's strategy to discourage OCU followers from joining the church. According to the OCU, the UOC often manipulated affiliation votes, for example by falsely describing eligible voters at such congregational meetings as unaffiliated with the parish, saying they rarely or never participated in religious services. The lawsuits remained unresolved through year's end.

In a January 6 interview with RBK Ukraine news agency, OCU Metropolitan Epiphaniy estimated that approximately 700 UOC parishes had become part of the OCU since its inception in 2018. In an October 12 interview with the suspilne.media news website, he said approximately 700 additional UOC parishes had joined the OCU since February 24.

According to Channel 5, on August 21, most residents of Tarasivka village, Kyiv Oblast, voted to affiliate their local UOC parish with the OCU. The UOC described the vote as unlawful because the gathering had reportedly been organized by a local government official rather than the congregation, and not all voters were its members. The UOC stated that three hundred parishioners opposed the change of affiliation. The OCU and local government rejected the claim, saying the overwhelming majority of parishioners were eager to join the OCU. The UOC stated that on December 7, a group of OCU members, accompanied by masked members of a territorial defense unit and led by local Mayor Oleksandr Zarubin, had tried to take possession of the church building and prevent UOC members from entering it. Some OCU supporters reportedly used force against their opponents. OCU representatives denied the charge and accused their UOC opponents of using force and hampering their legitimate access to the church.

UOC video footage showed that, on April 25, an unidentified man carrying an assault rifle came to the UOC St. Volodymyr's Church in Lviv, chanting "Death to Moskals" (a derogatory reference to Russians). He threatened that the church would soon be demolished. According to the UOC, police representatives were

near the church during the incident but did not intervene. On May 1, a group of young men disrupted a liturgy at the church. According to UOC video footage of the incident, they played loud music in front of the building and aggressively demanded that parish members leave the Moscow Patriarchate. The men left the church after police arrived. On May 8, unidentified persons sealed the church entrance with spray foam to prevent worshipers from entering the building. The vandals also spraypainted “Devils of the FSB [the Russian security service]” and “Putin’s home” on the church walls. On June 20, the church was seriously damaged by fire. The UOC stated that “people with radical views” had set fire to the building. According to the OCU and oblast authorities, on July 6, members of its congregation joined the OCU. The UOC denied the report, saying the oblast government had registered the parish as part of the OCU after receiving a “forged” application from a representative of a neighboring OCU congregation and that the parish did not change its affiliation.

On March 8, masked gunmen took control of UOC Holy Trinity Monastery on Dukonya mountain in Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast, in the western part of the country. They briefly detained the monastery’s abbot and a novice.

On May 24, OCU Primate Metropolitan Epiphaniy said, “We do not support violence against the clergy, laity, or property of the Moscow Patriarchate solely based on their jurisdictional affiliation. At the same time, if someone among followers of that religious association is guilty of collaboration with the aggressor and serving the enemy’s interests, they should be brought to justice for specific offenses.”

According to media outlets, on April 3, UOC opponents forced a UOC congregation in Dolyna, Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast, to close its church. The local government supported the closure and hosted what were termed “negotiations” between the activists and parish priest. The priest accepted the demand. Before the closure, the local authorities searched the church and parish vehicles. According to the Dolyna city council, “Residents who are not indifferent lost their patience. They consider the UOC to be an enemy because it had been under the cultural influence of the Russian Orthodoxy for a long time, and its clergy had an equivocal opinion about patriotic sentiment in Ukraine.”

On December 6, Lviv's Lychakivsky District Court found Volodymyr Marmash guilty of hate speech against the OCU and fined him 5,100 hryvnas (\$140). In May 2021, Marmash posted derogatory statements about the OCU on his Facebook page. He pleaded guilty.

According to the *zaxid.net* news website in September, the Volodymyrets District Court handed down a two-year suspended prison sentence to a UOC member who used a pitchfork to break the arm of an OCU supporter during a skirmish between residents in Zabolottya village, Rivne Oblast, in the western part of the country, in 2019. The individual pled guilty. The court also ordered her to pay 11,500 hryvnas (\$310) to the victim. The skirmish was the result of an ongoing church ownership dispute that escalated following the oblast government's decision to reregister the local Church of St. John, formerly owned by the UOC, as OCU property.

An ownership dispute between UOC and OCU members in Zadubrivka village in Chernivtsi Oblast concerning St Michael's the Archangel Church continued in the courts. In 2021, the Zastavna District Court rejected a UOC petition to revoke the registration of a newly created OCU parish in Zadubrivka and to transfer ownership of the Church of St. Michael the Archangel from the UOC to the OCU. The case remained pending at the Kyiv Economic Court at year's end.

There were again reports of vandalism of Christian monuments, Holocaust memorials, synagogues, Jewish cemeteries, and Jehovah's Witnesses' kingdom halls.

The interfaith organization AUCCRO continued to meet to promote religious diversity and national unity in the face of Russia's aggression and to discuss issues affecting the country, such as the religious situation in its temporarily occupied territories. The organization posted multiple statements on its website condemning Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, requesting humanitarian corridors to free citizens trapped by Russia's forces, and calling for temporary ceasefires, and peace. On February 16, in response to "anxiety and uncertainty," given the predictions of Russia's attacks, members of AUCCRO prayed for peace at Saint Sophia, "one of the most famous symbols of Ukraine." AUCCRO represents

more than 90 percent of all religious groups in the country, including the OCU, UOC, UGCC, RCC, All-Ukraine Baptist Union, Ukrainian Church of Evangelical Pentecostal Christians, Ukrainian Union Conference, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Ukrainian Christian Evangelical Church, Ukrainian Lutheran Church, Ukrainian Evangelical Church, Armenian Apostolic Church, Ukrainian Diocese, Union of Jewish Religious Organizations of Ukraine, Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine, German Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ukraine, Ukrainian Bible Society, and the Trans-Carpathian Reformed Church. The council rotates its chairmanship.

Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby visited Ukraine from November 30-December 2 with the stated purpose of showing solidarity with the people and churches of Ukraine. He met with leaders of Ukraine's churches and with internally displaced persons and observed the work of churches and charities providing support to them.

Leaders of evangelical churches from Ukraine, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Moldova, and the World Evangelical Alliance met on June 28 in Lviv to discuss support for those affected by the war.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

U.S. embassy officials, including the Ambassador and Chargé d'Affaires, met with officials of the Office of the President, Ministries of Culture and Information Policy, Interior, Justice, and Foreign Affairs, members of parliament, DESS, political parties, and local officials to engage on issues of religious freedom. They emphasized the importance of the fair and transparent treatment of religious groups, the preservation of religious heritage sites, government protection for the free exercise of religion, support for religious minorities, and combating antisemitism.

On March 3, the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom joined his counterparts from Australia, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Georgia, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom to "condemn Russia's

premeditated, unprovoked, and unjustified attack on Ukraine” and to “urge the Kremlin and Russia’s military to cease their illegal invasion and respect the safety of the civilian population of Ukraine, including all religious communities, and to respect the individually held human right to freedom of religion or belief at all times.”

On September 29, the anniversary of the Holocaust massacre in Babyn Yar, the Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues and her counterparts from Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, Romania, and the United Kingdom stated on behalf of their governments, “We can never let the memories of those victims and all who were murdered in the Holocaust be dishonored, erased, or cynically misused for political purposes. For 45 years after the end of the Second World War, the Soviet Union censored documentation of the Holocaust, including accurate research and records of the massacre of Jews at Babyn Yar. Thus, it is particularly horrifying that Vladimir Putin is trying to justify his unprovoked war against Ukraine by distorting and misappropriating Holocaust history.”

In remarks to the Jewish Federations of North America on March 2, the U.S. Deputy Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism said, “Russia’s unprovoked and unjustified invasion now may include destruction to religious and cultural sites in Ukraine. We are appalled by reports that a Russian missile has struck near the hallowed Holocaust memorial site of Babyn Yar.” He dismissed Russia’s attempts to accuse Ukraine of neo-Nazism and fascism as a pretext for its military aggression and “cover for its own provocations and human rights abuses.” “We condemn Putin’s continued exploitation of the history and suffering of the Holocaust and World War II for his coldblooded ends,” stated the official.

The Ambassador and other embassy officials participated in the 81st anniversary commemorations of the 1941 Babyn Yar massacre and in other Holocaust commemoration events to honor the victims and the Righteous Among Nations, underscoring the importance of preserving the memory of that tragedy and encouraging efforts to combat antisemitism.

The embassy continued to engage with Jewish religious leaders, organizations, and local authorities to discuss issues of antisemitism, promote Holocaust memorial efforts, and ensure the preservation of historic religious sites, including ancient Jewish cemeteries in Lviv and Uman. The Ambassador and other embassy officials participated in Holocaust commemorations, during which they encouraged efforts to combat antisemitism and preserve cultural heritage.

The embassy continued to engage with leaders of AUCCRO, which represents most religious groups in the country, to discuss the status of religious freedom in the country and religious persecution in the Russia-occupied territories. The meetings were occasions for Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Catholic, and Orthodox leaders to express their concerns regarding the state of religious freedom in the country and the status of religion in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, and to hear views on how the United States could further help promote religious freedom.

Embassy officials engaged with representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses to discuss their treatment in the country.

The embassy continued to use social media to underscore U.S. government support for religious freedom, including the rights of religious minorities. It regularly highlighted religious holidays and responded to the systematic mistreatment of religious minorities in Russia-occupied areas.

RUSSIA-OCCUPIED TERRITORIES OF UKRAINE

Executive Summary

Russia occupies Crimea and parts of Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, Mykolayiv, and Zaporizhzhya Oblasts.

In February 2014, armed forces of the Russian Federation seized and occupied Crimea. In March 2014, Russia claimed that Crimea had become part of the Russian Federation. The UN General Assembly's Resolution 68/262 of March 27, 2014, entitled "Territorial Integrity of Ukraine," and Resolution 75/192 of

December 28, 2020, entitled “Situation of Human Rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol (Ukraine),” affirmed continued international recognition of Crimea as part of Ukraine. The U.S. government recognizes that Crimea is part of Ukraine; it does not and will not recognize the purported annexation of Crimea. Russian occupation authorities continue to impose the laws of the Russian Federation in Crimea. On February 24, Russia began a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and on October 5, Russian President Vladimir Putin approved “treaties” on the purported annexation of the entire Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhya Oblasts following referendums in those territories that were almost universally described as illegitimate. On March 3 and October 12, United Nations General Assembly resolutions condemned both Russia’s invasion and purported annexation of these Ukrainian territories, respectively. Russia’s occupation authorities have had de facto control of parts of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts since 2014, exercising control through proxies. Following the invasion in February, Russia appointed local “authorities” in Kherson and Zaporizhzhya, as it did in Donetsk and Luhansk in 2014. The U.S. government recognizes Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhya Oblasts as part of Ukraine; it does not and will not recognize Russia’s purported annexation of these territories.

Since its invasion of Crimea and portions of Donbas in 2014, according to widespread reports, the Russian Federation and its proxies have committed widespread, ongoing, and egregious violations of the right to freedom of religion and conscience as well as physical and psychological abuse of religious minorities. Following Russia’s February 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, there have been similar widespread reports that Russia’s forces have intensified these practices and carried them into other occupied areas. Media sources, international organizations, religious freedom activists, the OCU, Muslims, Protestant churches, and Jehovah’s Witnesses stated that Russia-backed “authorities” in the Russia-occupied areas of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts continued to exert pressure on minority religious groups. Russia’s occupation authorities in control of Luhansk continued their ban of Jehovah’s Witnesses as an “extremist” organization, while the “Supreme Court” of Russia’s Donetsk occupation authorities upheld a similar ban. Russian-led occupation authorities in occupied areas of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts continued to implement “laws” requiring all religious

organizations except the UOC to undergo “state religious expert evaluations” and reregister with them. According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), most religious groups recognized under Ukrainian law continued to be unable to reregister because of stringent legal requirements under Russian law applied in occupied areas that prevent or discourage reregistration.

In June, the governing body of the ROC subordinated all three Crimea-based UOC dioceses directly to the Moscow Patriarch and in September, the ROC took the same step regarding the UOC Rovenky Diocese, located in the occupied portion of Luhansk Oblast.

Although embassy officials had no access to Russia-occupied territories in eastern and southern Ukraine, the embassy continued its outreach to religious representatives from these areas and continued to publicly condemn Russia’s targeted abuses against non-ROC religious communities. The Ambassador and other embassy officials met with Crimean Tatars, both internally displaced persons and those who had come to the government-controlled part of Ukraine, including lawyers and family members of political prisoners.

Section I: Religious Demography

According to 2021 Razumkov Center data on eastern Ukraine, encompassing the areas currently occupied by Russia, 61 percent of inhabitants identified as Orthodox, 27 percent claimed no religion, and 6 percent were “simply Christian.” These areas also maintain significant Baptist, Pentecostal, Seventh-day Adventist, UGCC, Muslim, and Jehovah’s Witnesses communities. Among Orthodox adherents, 32 percent identified with the OCU, 26 percent with the UOC, and 40 percent were “simply Orthodox.” According to VAAD, prior to the Russian aggression in eastern Ukraine, approximately 30,000 Jews lived in the Donbas region (Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts).

The Crimean Peninsula consists of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. According to State Statistics Service of Ukraine 2014 estimates (the most recent), the total population of the peninsula is 2,353,000. There are

no recent independent surveys with data on the religious affiliation of the population, but media outlets estimate that the number of Crimean Tatars, who are overwhelmingly Muslim, is 300,000, or 13 percent of the population.

According to information provided by the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture in 2014, the UOC remains the largest Christian denomination in Crimea. Smaller Christian denominations include the OCU, RCC, UGCC, and Jehovah's Witnesses, along with Protestant groups, including Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and Lutherans. Adherents of the UOC, Protestants, and Muslims are the largest religious groups in Sevastopol.

There are several Jewish congregations, mostly in Sevastopol and Simferopol. Jewish groups estimate between 10,000 and 15,000 Jewish residents lived in Crimea before the 2014 Russian occupation. No updates have been available since the occupation began. The 2001 census, the most recent, records 671 Karaites living in the region.

Section II: Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the four other oblasts Russia purported to annex remain within Ukraine's international borders and subject to the constitution and laws of Ukraine. In the aftermath of Russia's occupation, however, Russian occupation authorities in Donetsk, Luhansk (the Donbas), Kherson, and Zaporizhzhya continue their implementation of the laws of the Russian Federation. The Muslim religious-political group Hizb ut-Tahrir is considered a terrorist organization under Russian Federation law but not under Ukrainian law. According to Jehovah's Witnesses, Russian occupation authorities continue to ban Jehovah's Witnesses in Crimea under a 2017 ruling by the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation. Most religious communities have had difficulties registering to be in compliance with occupation authorities' law. Until their purported annexation by Russia in September, parts of Luhansk and Donetsk Oblasts were under the control of Russia-installed "authorities" purporting to represent the "Luhansk People's Republic" and the "Donetsk People's Republic."

Both so-called “republics” placed restrictions on religious groups not approved by Russia, including Jehovah’s Witnesses and Hizb ut-Tahir, both of which are banned in Russia. The Russian Supreme Court has banned the activities of several religious organizations on the grounds of “extremism” and “terrorism,” including a regional branch of Falun Gong, Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatars, Hizb ut-Tahrir, Nurdzhular (a Russification of the Turkish for “followers of Said Nursi”), Tablighi Jamaat, and the Fayzrakhmani Islamic community. These organizations are on the Federal List of Extremist Organizations or the Federal List of Terrorist Organizations. These restrictions apply to Crimea and the four purportedly annexed oblasts of Ukraine.

The Russian Federation adopted legal acts purported to formally extend the application of Russian law to the territory of the four regions of Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhya Oblasts on September 30. Despite the lack of validity under international law, they have had direct practical consequences for residents in the occupied regions. In particular, they provided that, as a matter of Russian law, all Ukrainian citizens and stateless persons permanently residing in these regions would be recognized as citizens of the Russian Federation, with the exception of those who failed to take an oath or formally rejected Russian citizenship within one month of the entry into force of Russia’s so-called “treaties” on annexation with the ostensibly independent, but Russian-controlled “governments,” in those areas. Residents who do not take Russian citizenship may be excluded from pensions, social security, and health insurance.

On October 19, the President of the Russian Federation signed decree No. 756, which imposed martial law in Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhya Oblasts. While the exact scope of martial law has yet to be determined, the decree provides for a wide range of measures that may be implemented “if required,” including curfews, property seizures, internment, and restrictions on freedom of movement, freedom of association and activities of political parties and other public associations.

According to occupation authorities, fines for individuals conducting illegal missionary activity range from 5,000 to 50,000 rubles (\$70 to \$700); the fine for legal entities is 100,000 to one million rubles (\$1,400 to \$14,000).

“Government” Practices

Since its invasion of Crimea and portions of Donbas in 2014, according to widespread reports, the Russian Federation and its proxies have committed widespread, ongoing, and egregious violations of the right to freedom of religion and conscience as well as physical and psychological abuse of religious minorities. Following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, there have been similar widespread reports that Russia’s forces have intensified these practices and carried them into other occupied areas. According to Forum 18, “Following Russia's renewed invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Russian and Russian-backed officials and soldiers have in newly occupied areas seized, tortured, and murdered religious leaders, searched and sealed places of worship to prevent their use for worship, confiscated equipment and literature, demanded documents, and in at least one case, forcibly expelled church members from their building.” According to the Institute for Religious Freedom, a local NGO, Russia’s occupation authorities sought “to control all religious activity, force local religious communities to justify Russian aggression, establish subordination with the Russian religious centers, and compel pro-Ukrainian religious actors to cooperate, using threats and torture.” In a September 27 Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine, the OHCHR stated, “In territory occupied by the Russian Federation or controlled by Russian armed forces or affiliated armed groups, the overall environment for religious minorities remains highly restrictive. OHCHR is concerned that shrinking civic space hinders individuals from reporting human rights violations that they may have experienced or witnessed.”

In a report presented on June 29 by Kyiv-based NGO Institute for Religious Freedom (IRF), IRF Board Chairman Oleksandr Zayets stated, “If during the last few years, the Russian invaders only threatened to kill priests, now religious leaders are being killed and tortured – again, but on a scale far worse than in 2014. If previously, Russian occupation authorities expelled Ukrainian believers from their churches and prayer houses, now Russia is destroying the spiritual heritage of Ukraine with bombs and missile strikes without justification by military necessity.” IRF noted that the Russian occupation authorities sought “to control all religious activity, force local religious communities to justify Russian

aggression, establish subordination with the Russian religious centers, and compel pro-Ukrainian religious actors to cooperate using threats and torture.” According to the report, “Russian media and religious leaders, like Patriarch Kirill, of Moscow and All Russia, are justifying the war against Ukraine with propaganda about the supposed protection of Orthodox believers of the Moscow Patriarchate and Russian speakers. Instead, Russian military aircraft and artillery destroy both houses of worship and believers, regardless of language, denomination, and ethnicity.”

In a report entitled “Russian Attacks on Religious Freedom in Ukraine,” IRF stated that occupation authorities were responsible for at least 20 cases of illegal imprisonment of Ukrainian religious figures of various faiths. The report stated that in some cases, these detentions included severe abuses, including physical mistreatment, mock executions, and inhumane conditions.

According to Forum 18, “Serious violations of freedom of religion and belief and other human rights take place within all the occupied Ukrainian territory. Within the Russian-occupied Ukrainian region of Crimea these include forced imposition of Russian laws and restrictions on exercising human rights, including freedom of religion or belief; jailing Muslim and Jehovah's Witness Crimean prisoners of conscience; forcible closure of places of worship; and fining people for leading meetings for worship without Russian state permission. Within the Russian-occupied Ukrainian region of Luhansk these have up to the renewed 2022 invasion of Ukraine included: rendering illegal all Protestant and non-Moscow Patriarchate Orthodox communities; a climate of fear about discussing human rights violations; repeated denials of permission to a Roman Catholic priest to live in the region; and increasing numbers of banned allegedly ‘extremist’ books, including an edition of the Gospel of John published in 1820.”

According to a Yale University report published on November 18, Russians captured three religious leaders, including one Crimean Tatar religious leader and two UOC priests. The Russians released the two UOC priests after one week. The Crimean Tatar was accused of terrorism for allegedly belonging to the Noman Celebicihan Battalion, a former Crimean Tatar volunteer unit declared a terrorist organization by the Russian Supreme Court, and he remained in detention.

According to the Center for Journalistic Investigations, on November 22, Russia's forces took Anatoliy Prokopchuk, a deacon with the local evangelical Christian church, and his son Oleksandr to an unknown location in the vicinity of Rayske village, Kherson Oblast. Relatives and friends questioned why Russia's forces would want to talk to the Prokopchuks and posted a notice on social networks asking for any information on the health and whereabouts of the two family members. On November 27, family members informed the Center for Journalistic Investigations that both father and son were found shot and killed in a forest near Nova Kakhovka, on the left bank of the Dnipro River.

In an interview with the Ukrainian National News Agency (Ukrinform), OCU priest and military chaplain Serhiy Chudynovych stated that on March 30, Russian gunmen detained him at his church in Kherson. After searching the church and his house, they interrogated him at a local police office. They kept Chudynovych for some time in a cold and dark basement without access to the toilet and drinking water, threatening to "rip him to pieces" to extract a confession from him. The interrogators offered him vodka when he was thirsty. Later they tied his hands behind his back, blindfolded him, pulled a hat over his head, and repeatedly hit his injured kneecap with a hard object. When his heartbeat became irregular, they beat him close to the heart with a stick. When Chudynovych repeated his refusal to collaborate, the interrogators pulled down his trousers, forced him to his knees and pressed his head against a chair with a knee, threatened to rape him with a stick, and choked him until he said he would collaborate with Russia's forces. He was then forced to stand partially undressed for some time before the interrogators untied his hands and let him put on his trousers. Throughout the interrogation they subjected him to verbal abuse, including derogatory comments about the Christian faith. They released Chudynovych after he signed a statement pledging to collaborate. Due to knee damage caused by the interrogators, he was unable to walk for two days after his release.

In the morning of March 26, according to a video interview by IRF, Russia's forces detained Rustem Asanov, imam of the Crimean Tatar congregation in Shchaslyvtseve, Kherson Oblast, as he was driving through a military checkpoint.

The Russians said he set the “wrong example” for local Muslims due to his participation in a pro-Ukraine rally. They put a bag over his head, handcuffed him, and took him to a school basement converted into a torture cell. During an interrogation, the imam lost consciousness, almost suffocating when the interrogators tightened the bag. The interrogators kicked him in the ribs and spine and hit him with a hard object in the small of the back. They knocked him down repeatedly, tightening the handcuffs around his wrists and causing severe pain and a persisting inability to move his thumbs. According to Asanov, occupation authorities released him in the evening of the same day after they determined he was not a member of a military unit. Before his release, they demanded he not leave the oblast and that he agree to collaborate with the Russian military and the Russia-run Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Crimea and Sevastopol. Asanov and his family managed to flee the occupied area and eventually make their way to Kyiv. According to Asanov, occupation authorities searched mosques in the Henichesk district of Kherson Oblast, seizing books and giving imams lists of recommended and banned religious publications. He said local Muslims suspended holding religious services due to Russian intimidation.

In March, Russia’s forces detained UOC protodeacon Andriy Koval in Kherson, reportedly because of his pro-Ukrainian views. According to the cleric’s interview with the Dialogtut.org website, they put a bag over his head while transporting him to an interrogation room. Koval stated that during his interrogation, FSB agents used torture, including beating and electric shocks, until he wrote a statement “renouncing” his clerical duties. The interrogators then resumed beating the cleric, tied his arms and legs, and threw him to the floor in an attempt to force him to endorse on camera Russia’s allegations that Ukrainian forces killed children in the Russia-occupied part of the Donbas region. Koval stated that before releasing him, FSB representatives beat and threatened to rape him and forced him to drink an unknown liquid in front of a Russian “journalist” filming him as a “toast” for the children of Donbas.

According to the Religious Information Service of Ukraine, on April 9, Russia’s forces detained Artur Kozhevnikov, chairman of the German Evangelical Lutheran community in Berdyansk, Zaporizhzhya Oblast, and took him to a local military

commandant's office. The report said there was no information on Kozhevnikov since his detention.

According to the Kyiv-based Ukrainian human rights organization Crimean Human Rights Group (CHRG), the Russian government unlawfully incarcerated or imprisoned at least 149 individuals pursuant to politically or religiously motivated persecution in Crimea during the year, compared with 117 persons in 2021.

Human rights groups said occupation authorities continued to impede the rights of Crimean Tatars following the 2016 designation of the Mejlis, recognized under Ukrainian law as the democratically elected representative council of Crimean Tatars, as an extremist organization. Rights groups reported that detentions and forced psychiatric examinations of Crimean Tatar Muslim prisoners continued throughout the year. According to the CHRG, in October and November, the FSB subjected Vilen Temeryanov to a forced examination at the Simferopol psychiatric hospital as part of a Hizb ut-Tahrir case; in August, the FSB conducted 4:00 am searches of the homes of four Crimean Tatars, including Temeryanov.

According to CHRG, as of December, 88 Crimean residents remained in prison for alleged involvement in Muslim religious organizations declared terrorist or extremist in Russia but legal in Ukraine. In most cases, these were individuals accused of belonging to Hizb ut-Tahrir, which is illegal under Russian law, but detainees also included individuals accused of belonging to Tablighi Jamaat and Takfir wal-Hijra. According to the CHRG, during the year, occupation authorities detained 10 additional Crimean Tatars on charges of Hizb ut-Tahrir membership. Observers stated they believed these individuals were largely prosecuted in retaliation for their opposition to Russia's occupation of Crimea. Their cases were considered, according to the CHRG, "in violation of the right to a fair trial; the main evidence for the court is the testimony of anonymous witnesses (many of whom are RF FSB men), pre-trial testimony of witnesses who later declare in court that such testimony was given under duress, and linguistic examinations of conversations of the accused Muslims." The evidence provided by the defense was usually rejected by "judges."

According to the CHRG, on May 12, a panel of “judges” of the Southern District Military Court in Crimea, consisting of Rizvan Zubayirov, Roman Saprunov, and Maxim Nikitin, sentenced Izzet Abdullayev, Vladlen Abdulkadyrov, Tofik Abdulgazyev, and Medzhit Abdurakhmanov to 12 years in a maximum-security penal colony, with the first five years to be served in prison. The charges included “participation in activities in an organization recognized as terrorist” (Hizb ut-Tahrir). Another defendant in the case, Bilial Adilov, was sentenced to 14 years in a maximum-security penal colony, with the first five years to be served in prison.

According to the CHRG, on February 9, occupation authorities arrested Crimean Tatars Marlen Mustafayev, Ernest Seytosmanov, Ansar Osmanov, and Ametkhan Abdulvapov on suspected Hizb ut-Tahrir membership. The arrests took place after searches in homes in Simferopol, Bakhchisaray, Bilohirs’k, and Balaklava districts. The CHRG stated that FSB representatives planted and then “found” prohibited publications during searches at Osmanov and Mustafayev’s homes.

According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, occupation authorities seized 26 kingdom halls in newly occupied areas of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhya, and Kherson Oblasts in 2022. In Zaporizhzhya Oblast, occupation authorities seized a kingdom hall in Berdyansk and placed members of its congregation on a wanted list, reported RIA Melitopol news website on December 17. On September 6, Russia’s forces seized a kingdom hall on Oles Honchar Street in Melitopol. Eight kingdom halls were destroyed, 17 sustained serious damage, and 76 had sustained minor damage during the fighting since February.

According to the Jehovah’s Witnesses, Russian occupation authorities continued to ban Jehovah’s Witnesses’ activities in Crimea, ostensibly under a 2017 ruling by the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation outlawing the group. The OHCHR reported that all 22 congregations of Jehovah’s Witnesses registered in Crimea had no right to operate since 2017. As a result, practicing members of Jehovah’s Witnesses risked retaliation by law enforcement and were subject to detention, house arrest, or travel restrictions. According to the CHRG, as of December, at least 12 Jehovah’s Witnesses were imprisoned or detained, including five sentenced to imprisonment during the year.

According to Forum 18, as of November, there were seven members of Jehovah's Witnesses serving jail terms in Russia or awaiting Russian sentencing in Crimea on charges of extremism to punish their exercise of freedom of religion or belief: Serhiy Filatov, Artem Herasymov, Viktor Stashevskyy, Ihor Schmidt, Volodymyr Sakada, Volodymyr Maladyka, and Yevgeny Zhukov.

On October 6, the Russian human rights NGO OVD-info reported that the Nahimov District Court in Sevastopol sentenced Jehovah Witnesses Volodymyr Sakada, Yevgeny Zhukov, and Volodymyr Maladyka to six years in a penal colony for participation in the activities of an extremist organization.

According to media site *investigator.org*, on June 18, occupation authorities detained Valentyn Zhuravlev, pastor of the Protestant Spring of Life Church, during an interfaith prayer service in Melitopol, Zaporizhzhya Oblast. Authorities later released Zhuravlev but prohibited him from serving as a pastor in the city. According to the same report, clergy from several other Protestant churches in the city were also detained by Russia's forces or they quickly departed to avoid detention.

According to Forum 18, on February 16, a court in Kerch convicted Jehovah's Witnesses members Artem Shably on "extremism"-related charges and sentenced him to a two-year suspended sentence, with three years' probation.

According to Forum 18, on November 16, Russia's forces arrested Ivan Levytskyy and Bohdan Heleta, UGCC priests from the parish of the Nativity of the Mother of God in Berdyansk, Zaporizhzhya Oblast. On November 17, the Russians searched the parish church. The Donetsk Exarchate called on Russia's forces to free the two priests, stating that Heleta needed regular medication for a serious health condition. According to UGCC Major Archbishop Sviatoslav, after the priests' arrest, occupation authorities planted military items in their church and accused the priests of illegal possession of weapons. "According to classic Stalinist methods of repression, confessions to crimes they did not commit are being extracted from them." The priests "were being mercilessly tortured" and remained "in danger of death every day," stated the UGCC head. Their location remained unknown at the end of year.

According to Petro Krenytskyy, the priest of a UGCC parish in Melitopol, Zaporizhzhya Oblast, on November 25, several FSB gunmen came to his church, hit his head against the wall, forced him to kneel, and beat him. After searching the church and the priest's home, the FSB representatives pulled a bag over his head and "deported" him from the occupied area, citing UGCC opposition to Russia's aggression. Prior to releasing him, an FSB representative confiscated his money and mobile phone and ordered Krenytskyy to walk toward a Ukrainian checkpoint, threatening to shoot him. The occupation authorities also deported UGCC parish priest Oleksandr Bohomaz from Melitopol.

According to *Ukrinform*, on March 14, members of Russia's military searched the home of OCU priest Oleh Nikolayev, in Berdyansk, Zaporizhzhya Oblast. Following the search, they briefly detained Nikolayev and took him to an unknown location. Russia's forces ordered Nikolayev's disabled wife, who required constant medical treatment, to remain at home.

According to the independent regional online media outlet *zprz/city*, in October, Russian occupation authorities evicted 74-year-old OCU priest Svyatoslav Pitsersky from his home in Melitopol, characterizing him as "extremist" because of his refusal to recognize the results of Russia's sham referendum purporting to annex the region. They forced the priest to leave the occupied part of the oblast.

According to the Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group, on October 6, Sevastopol's Nakhimoskyy District "Court" sentenced three Jehovah's Witnesses, Volodymyr Sakada, Volodymyr Maladyka, and Yevhen Zhukov, who were arrested in 2020 on "extremism" charges, to six years' imprisonment in a medium security prison, to be followed by a seven-year ban on educational activities (public addresses or the publication of materials in media outlets or on the internet), and a further year of restricted liberty at the end of the sentences. The charges were primarily based on Zoom recordings of Jehovah's Witnesses meetings that were made by an FSB infiltrator, on the instruction of senior FSB investigator Dmitry Shevchenko. According to Kharkiv group, during the meetings, the defendants simply read and discussed religious literature.

According to Forum 18, occupation authorities continued to prosecute and fine individuals in Crimea for conducting missionary activity. Of the 12 individuals known to have been prosecuted in Russia-occupied Crimea between January and August for conducting missionary activity, nine, including five Crimean Tatar Muslims, were fined for leading prayers in their own communities.

According to Forum 18, on June 16, the Dzhankoy District “Court,” Northeast Crimea, rejected Emir Medzhitov's appeal of a fine of three weeks’ average local wages for leading Friday prayers in a mosque. His public defender stated that the prosecution had not proven that Medzhitov had conducted the “missionary activity” for which he was punished.

In Simferopol District, Crimea, the “district prosecutor's office” said Muslim prayer leader Reshat Seidaliyev had conducted prayer services for an “undetermined circle of people who were not members (or followers) of the given religious group.” The prosecutor's office also stated that Seidaliyev did not have appropriate written permission to lead worship from the Crimean Muftiate, a body through which Russia’s occupation “authorities,” according to Forum 18, “appear to want to control all Muslim activity on the peninsula.” On May 19, Judge Tatyana Kiryukhina found Seidaliyev guilty and fined him 10,000 rubles (\$140).

Forum 18 reported that on February 18, a “court” in central Crimea ordered Liana Palyokha to pay a fine of 7,000 rubles (\$98) after the Russian FSB found her leading worship in a Pentecostal group.

On June 5, police, prosecutors, and FSB raided a Baptist church in Saky, Crimea, during a worship service, according to Forum 18. On August 16, Russia’s occupation authorities fined three members of the congregation.

Russia continued to ban the Tablighi Jamaat Muslim missionary movement in Crimea under a 2009 ruling by the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, although the movement remained legal in Ukraine.

On September 16, Russia withdrew from the ECHR, but according to the European Convention on Human Rights, Russia continued to have a binding legal obligation to implement the ECHR's judgments and decisions. In January 2021, the ECHR issued a decision accepting for consideration Ukraine's complaint alleging that Russia was responsible for multiple human rights violations in Crimea between February 2014 and August 2015. Among the claims accepted was Ukraine's allegation that Russia's local occupation authorities harassed and intimidated religious leaders not conforming to the Russian Orthodox faith, arbitrarily raided places of worship, and confiscated religious property in violation of the convention.

On August 25, in a speech at the first parliamentary summit of the Crimea Platform, an international grouping aimed at restoring Ukrainian control over Crimea, President Zelenskyy said the Russian "enslavement" of Crimea marked the "birth of an antihuman system that tortures, deprives of freedom and injures men, women and children without distinction of age, sex, religion or ethnicity." He also stated, "Since 2014, Crimea is the only part of Europe where de facto purges continue on religious and ethnic grounds. If you are a Muslim, the Russian occupiers consider you guilty. If you are a *qirimh* [Crimean Tatar], the Russian occupiers consider you guilty."

Media outlets reported that Crimean Tartars were being deliberately and disproportionally conscripted for military service against Ukraine. According to Jehovah's Witnesses, throughout the year, Russia's occupation authorities in Donetsk often required male believers to undergo military training and threatened those who refused with large fines.

According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), most religious groups recognized under Ukrainian law continued to be unable to reregister because of stringent legal requirements under Russian law applied in occupied areas that prevented or discouraged reregistration.

According to Russia's Ministry of Justice, as of year's end, 927 religious organizations were registered in Crimea, compared with 928 in 2021. The number of religious organizations had dropped by more than 1,000 since the

occupation began in 2014, the last year for which Ukrainian government figures were available. Registered religious organizations included the two largest – the Christian Orthodox UOC and the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Crimea – as well as various Protestant, Jewish, RCC, and Greek Catholic communities, among other religious groups.

On February 9, the OCU official website reported that at the beginning of the occupation in 2014, 45 OCU parishes with 14 priests were operating in Crimea, but only seven parishes and four priests remained as of February. According to the website, occupation authorities continued to subject them to “systemic persecution” because of the OCU’s pro-Ukrainian position, putting its Crimean diocese “on the brink of survival.”

Human rights groups reported Russia’s occupation authorities continued to require imams at Crimean Tatar mosques to inform them each time they transferred from one mosque to another.

The RCC continued to operate in the territory as a pastoral district directly under the authority of the Holy See. Occupation authorities permitted some Polish and Ukrainian RCC priests to stay in the territory for only 90 days at a time and required them to leave Crimea for 90 days before returning.

UGCC leaders said they continued to have difficulty staffing their parishes because of the policies of occupation authorities, who they said continued to require them to register their congregations in Crimea as parishes of the Catholic Church of the Byzantine Rite, thereby removing all reference to Ukraine in their name, and to operate as a part of the pastoral district of the RCC.

According to the Jehovah’s Witnesses, Russia’s occupation authorities in Donetsk Oblast continued to label the group an extremist organization, and as such, its activities were banned. According to Protestant and Jehovah’s Witnesses groups, many of their members fled occupied areas to escape oppressive conditions and to seek greater religious freedom in Ukrainian government-controlled territory. The Jehovah’s Witness annual report stated, “In the occupied territory of Donetsk there is a real threat of kidnapping, torture, and imprisonment at all times for

every Jehovah's Witness." According to the Jehovah's Witnesses, the "law" applied by Russia's occupation authorities on worship and religious associations in Donetsk continued to "ban all religious organizations that did not meet a March 2019 registration deadline and to require previously registered religious groups to reregister." In 2021, Russia's occupation authorities in Donetsk Oblast amended the "law" defining what constitutes a religious association, upholding the stipulation that religious associations exist only if they are registered. The amendments tightened the definition of a religious association, restricting its activities to only "participants and/or members." The amendment defines a religious association's activities as holding religious beliefs, conducting worship services and other religious rites and ceremonies, and "the teaching of religion and the religious education of its participants and/or members." The amendment removed the definition of religious activity as "missionary practice and religious educational activity, including the spread of religious knowledge, the provision of professional religious education and the religious education of its participants."

According to Forum 18, Russia's occupation authorities in Donetsk Oblast denied registration to almost all religious communities, apart from the UOC. As of September 2019, there were only 36 registered non-UOC religious communities. In 2021, the Donetsk "Justice Ministry" told Forum 18 it was no longer responsible for the registration of religious communities. As of year's end, new registration statistics had not been published.

Religious leaders continued to say Russia-led Luhansk authorities reregistration denials represented a complete ban on their religious activities, since without reregistration, religious groups were not able to hold services, even in believers' homes. To be eligible for registration, a local religious organization must have at least 30 adult members, while a centralized religious organization must be composed of at least five such local organizations. These requirements effectively disqualified some smaller religious associations. The "law" also required Christian Orthodox congregations to register as part of a "diocese recognized by the Orthodox churches around the world within the canonical territory of the Moscow Patriarchate," thereby forcing several remaining OCU parishes to conduct any activities underground.

In a February report on areas of Luhansk Oblast controlled by the so-called “Luhansk People’s Republic,” published prior to Russia’s full-scale invasion, Forum 18 stated that “all human rights including the freedom of religion and belief are severely restricted” in Luhansk. The NGO cataloged abuses committed by Russia-led forces, including imposing a restrictive 2018 “religion law” requiring reregistration of religious communities already registered under Ukrainian law, as well as banning any religious community that did not obtain the permission of Russia’s proxy authorities to exist in Luhansk. According to the report, this resulted in the denial of permission for any Protestant and non-UOC communities to exist; punishment for meeting for worship without permission from Russia’s proxy authorities; the banning by the “State Security Ministry” of all Ukrainian Baptist Union communities, despite this being illegal under Luhansk “law,” as no court order was apparently made; repeated raids on places of worship; denial of access by unregistered religious communities to their properties; the shutdown of charitable activities by unregistered religious communities; surveillance of local religious communities and the encouragement by Russia’s proxy “authorities” in Luhansk Oblast of a “climate of fear about discussing human rights violations” and the “cutting off of gas, water, and electricity supplies to all places of worship owned by unregistered communities; and the prevention of contacts with fellow believers elsewhere in Ukraine.”

The report added that this led to “the repeated inability of Catholics to receive communion at Mass, a central part of the Catholic faith; and an increasing list of banned allegedly ‘extremist’ books, including an edition of the Gospel of John originally published in 1820.” The gospel was published by the Council of Baptist Churches and was widely used by other Christian churches, including the UOC, according to the articles.

Religious and human rights groups continued to report Russian media efforts to create suspicion and fear among certain religious groups, especially targeting Crimean Tatar Muslims, whom media repeatedly accused of having links to Islamic groups designated by Russia as terrorist groups, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir. Russian media portrayed Jehovah’s Witnesses as “extremists.”

According to religious organizations and civil society activists, Russia's occupation authorities in Donetsk continued to harass Protestant congregations attempting to host public religious events, even if such had gained registration. They charged, for example, that the U.S. government might be funding such events, and they publicly labeled congregations "American agents." Protestant leaders and religious experts said they attributed such activities by Russia's occupation authorities in Donetsk as attempts to undermine the strong prewar presence of Protestants in the region.

According to Forum 18, in 2021, the Russia-led Donetsk "Justice Ministry" of the so-called "Donetsk People's Republic" released an updated "list of extremist materials" containing 97 items, some of them religious. Most publications banned by the "Supreme Court" – including Jehovah's Witness and Islamic publications – also appeared on the list. The "Culture Minister," Mikhail Zheltyakov, instructed all institutions under the ministry's control to publicly display the lists of banned organizations and banned publications in their institutions. According to a 2021 Forum 18 report, the "State List of Extremist Materials," by Russia's proxy "authorities" in Luhansk, contained 26 items: 18 published by Protestants and six by Jehovah's Witnesses. According to numerous, credible reports, Russia's forces in many areas burned Ukrainian-language Bibles and other religious literature.

According to IRF, as of September 22, at least 270 religious buildings and sacred places had been damaged by Russian shelling, including 71 in Donetsk Oblast, 53 in Kyiv Oblast, 39 in Kharkiv Oblast, and 40 in Luhansk Oblast.

According to a study by the Workshop for the Academic Study of Religion (WASR), a Ukraine-based NGO, Russia's forces were responsible for the widespread destruction of religious buildings, as well as the killing, wounding, and abduction of religious leaders. The study, *Religion on Fire: Documenting Russia's War Crimes against Religious Communities in Ukraine*, stated that as of November 1, nearly 350 sacred sites in the country had been destroyed since the full-scale invasion, noting that the actual number could be much higher. Most of the damaged or destroyed religious sites belonged to the UOC (179), followed by Protestant communities (108), the OCU (24), Jewish (14), Muslim (6), Roman

Catholic (5), and UGCC (3) congregations. Several other destroyed buildings belonged to the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, Karaites, and Krishna Consciousness Society. Most of those sites were houses of worship, as well as chapels, cemeteries, and other places of sacred significance for the respective communities. Most of the sites were in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts with others in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Sumy, Mykolayiv, Kherson, and Chernihiv Oblasts. The report stated there were at least 16 cases of targeted destruction of churches, among them a historic 19th-century wooden church in Lukyanivka, Kyiv Oblast, that was deliberately targeted by tanks.

On April 27, the Human Rights Ombudsperson stated that Russia's occupation authorities had brought construction vehicles to a historic Muslim cemetery in Bakhchisaray, Crimea, to convert the cemetery into a recreation area.

On February 17, the Ukrainian parliament adopted a resolution to transfer the Saints Volodymyr and Olha Cathedral, the only OCU church building in Simferopol, Crimea, and the location of the OCU diocesan administration, from the ownership of the government of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea to central government ownership. Pursuant to the resolution, on October 28, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted an implementing document to carry out the transfer. OCU sources stated they believed the decision would enable Ukraine to take Russia to international courts over its refusal to allow OCU members to use the premises. In 2021, the Russia-led "Arbitration Court of Crimea" ordered the transfer of the cathedral premises to the use of the Russian Ministry of Property of Crimea.

Crimean Tatars reported police continued to be slow to investigate vandalism of Islamic religious properties or refused to investigate them at all.

On November 1, Oleshky Mayor Yevhen Ryshchuk reported that occupation authorities had destroyed four crosses near the OCU Church of the Protection of the Mother of God in Oleshky, Kherson Oblast.

According to Forum 18, on June 23, Russia's military brought a delegation of Moscow Patriarchate priests to the occupied Black Sea port city of Mariupol, where they toured churches, including the OCU Church of Petro Mohyla. After

the visit of what Forum 18 termed “Moscow FSB agents in cassocks,” the church’s large library, collected by volunteers and benefactors, was seized and “burned in the yard,” stated Petro Andryushchenko, advisor to the (Ukrainian) mayor of Mariupol, who had fled the city.

On November 9, the Baptist Union reported that Russia’s forces had used a Baptist church in Vovchovarivka village, Luhansk Oblast, as a military barracks, looted it, and then burned down the building.

On October 25, the Baptist Union reported that Russia’s forces had seized and looted three Baptist churches in Kherson Oblast. The invaders used two of them as military barracks and kept another church locked.

On May 18, the Mariupol City Council elected before the Russian takeover of the city reported that Russian military strikes had destroyed the city’s synagogue and Jewish community center.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

On June 7, the Holy Synod, a governing body of the ROC, subordinated all three Crimea-based UOC dioceses directly to the Moscow Patriarch. On September 13, the synod directly subordinated to him the Rovenky Diocese located in the occupied part of Luhansk Oblast.

According to media sources, on December 7, unidentified individuals damaged more than 10 tombstones at a historic military cemetery in Sevastopol. Police detained three teenage suspects.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Although embassy officials had no access to Russia-occupied territories in eastern and southern Ukraine, the embassy continued its outreach to religious representatives from these areas and on several occasions publicly condemned Russia’s continued abuses against religious minorities.

The U.S. government condemned the continued intimidation of Christian and Muslim religious groups by Russia's occupation authorities in occupied areas and called international attention to religious rights abuses committed by Russia's forces through public statements by the Secretary of State and other senior officials.

Embassy officials also continued to meet with Muslim, Orthodox, and Protestant leaders from occupied oblasts of Ukraine to discuss human rights abuses by Russia's occupation authorities and to demonstrate continued U.S. government support for their right to the free exercise of religion. Embassy officials highlighted Russia's religious rights abuses in public messaging.

Embassy officials as well as other Department of State officials and the Secretary of State participated in the August 23 virtual Crimea Platform Summit, an international gathering of senior officials to discuss Russia's purported "annexation" of Crimea, in which human rights was one of the five key topics. The Secretary of State spoke at the event, reaffirming U.S. government support for Ukraine and condemning the "unrelenting crackdown on Crimea's minority ethnic and religious groups." Embassy officials continued to meet with Crimean Muslim, Orthodox, and Protestant leaders to discuss their concerns regarding actions taken against their congregations by the occupation authorities and to demonstrate continued U.S. government support for their right to practice freely their religious beliefs.